

**Swindon Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy  
2021 – 2024**

***Our vision is to end domestic abuse, to make every family safe. To do this we need to listen to survivors, be guided by the evidence of what works and make domestic abuse everybody's business.  
Adapted from SafeLives – Whole Picture Strategy***



## Contents

1. Defining Domestic Abuse	3
2. Prevalence of Domestic Abuse	4
3. The Local Picture	4
4. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021	4
5. The Local Authority Statutory Housing Duty	5
6. The Definition of Support	6
7. Current Safe Accommodation in Swindon	7
8. Needs Assessment and New Burden's funding	7
9. Current Safe Accommodation Support Provision	7
10. New Burden's Safe Accommodation Support	8
11. Strategic Priorities and Actions into Part 4 of the DA Act 2021	8
12. Recommendations from the 2021 Strategic Needs Assessment	8
13. Local Partnership Board (LPB)	9
14. Wider Context of the Strategy	9
15. How will we know we have made a difference?	9
16. Appendix 1 – Full legal definition of Domestic Abuse	10

## 1. Defining Domestic Abuse

This strategy adopts the government definition of Domestic Abuse which is outlined in The Domestic Abuse Act 2021. It states that domestic abuse covers a wide range of behaviours that are used to control, threaten or intimidate victims.

Behaviours are classed as domestic abuse if:

- Both the individuals are over 16 years of age
- Both the individual are 'personally connected' to each other and the behaviour is abusive

Behaviour is considered abusive if it consists of one or more of the following:

- physical or sexual abuse
- psychological or emotional abuse
- coercive or controlling behaviour – intimidation, threats, humiliation that is used to punish, harm, isolate a victim and prevent them from enjoying life
- Economic abuse – any behaviours that prevents a victim having the ability to acquire, use or maintain money or obtain goods or services.

### Use of Language in this Strategy

#### **Victim/survivor**

These terms are used interchangeably throughout this strategy to refer to people who have or are currently experiencing domestic abuse.

#### **Perpetrator**

This term is used throughout to refer to the person using abuse.

#### **Lived experience**

This term refers to individuals who share their expertise and knowledge based on their first-hand experience of domestic abuse, including controlling or coercive behaviour, economic abuse, psychological or emotional and/or physical and sexual abuse.

#### **Specialist domestic abuse service**

This term refers to organisations/services independent from the state (i.e. third sector), whose core business is to support victim/survivors and/or perpetrators and/or children and young people impacted by domestic abuse and other forms of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) - including sexual violence, forced marriage, so called 'honour based' violence, female genital mutilation (FGM), sexual exploitation.

## 2. The Prevalence of Domestic Abuse

Domestic Abuse can happen to anyone regardless of age, gender, sexuality, socio-economic background or profession.

- 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 Men will experience domestic abuse at some point in their lives.
- On average 2 women are murdered every week by a partner or ex-partner because of domestic abuse.
- The NSPCC reports that 1 in 5 children are exposed to domestic abuse within their family.
- Domestic Abuse is one of the leading causes of homelessness.

## 3. The Local Picture

In 2020-21:

- 5,540 incidents of domestic abuse were reported to Wiltshire Police of these:
    - 2854 were crimes
    - 2686 were incidents (was arsy t
  - 92 women accessed refuge accommodation in Swindon
  - 132 children were accommodated
  - 10 were declined due to lack of space or due to unable to meet their needs
  - People aged 26 to 30 years were the highest age range accessing refuge
  - 488 cases were heard at MARAC ( Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences) and 651 children lived within those households
- \*(NB. Some victims would have been heard at MARAC more than once)

## 4. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021

### Overview of the Act

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (“the Act”) received Royal Assent on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2021. The Act has overhauled the response and support offered to victims and survivors of domestic abuse with changes in protection, legislation and a new definition of domestic abuse which, for the first time, recognises children and young people as victims in their own right. It also includes economic abuse.

### The Domestic Abuse 2021 Act aims to:

- Protect and support victims – to enhance the safety of victims and the support they receive;
- Transform the justice process – to provide support to victims throughout the justice process and an effective response to perpetrators to end the cycle of abuse;
- Improve performance – to drive consistency and better performance in the response to domestic abuse; and
- Promote awareness – put domestic abuse at the top of everybody's agenda

## 5. Local Authority Statutory Housing Duty

Part 4 of the Act sets out the Statutory Housing Duty on all Local Authorities to provide safe accommodation and support to victims and to disrupt perpetrators.

Part 4 of the Act places the following duties on Swindon Borough Council to:

- Set up a Multi- Agency Local Partnership Board (LPB) that will be responsible for performing certain functions including oversight of the Housing Duty.
- To undertake a needs assessment to map the needs of victims and their children to ensure safe accommodation offers them the services they require. This includes victims from out of the area.
- Develop and publish a safe accommodation strategy based on the needs of victims in the area.
- Implement the strategy through a commissioning or decommissioning process
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.
- Report back annually to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) on progress.

A full list of the measures and commencement schedule can be found at the following links;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-act-2021-commencement-schedule/domestic-abuse-act-2021-commencement-schedule>

To fulfil Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act the Domestic Abuse & Violence Against Women and Girls Board (DA & VAWH Board) will be the local partnership board and this strategy will set out Swindon's overall and holistic approach to deliver a rounded offer of support to victims in safe accommodation.

Meeting the housing needs of victims is a priority within this strategy and equally as important is the offer of support when placed in safe accommodation.

The definition of Safe accommodation is intended to be broad based and recognises the wide diversity of safe accommodation that domestic abuse victims and their children may live in or choose to live in, including:

- Refuge accommodation
- Specialist safe accommodation
- Dispersed accommodation
- Sanctuary schemes
- Move-on or second stage accommodation

The description covers accommodation provided by a local housing authority, a private registered provider of social housing or a registered charity whose objectives

include the provision of support to victims of domestic abuse, or accommodation which is part of a local authority sanctuary scheme.

Safe accommodation is not bed and breakfast accommodation nor mixed hostel settings.

## **6. The Definition of Support**

The new duty will provide the following types of support:

- i. Advocacy Support – development of safety plans. Working with other services for example GPs, Social Workers, Welfare Benefit providers, Hospital Trust.
- ii. Domestic Abuse Prevention Advice – supporting victims to recognise the signs of abuse an abusive relationship to help them break the cycle of domestic abuse... Advice on keeping safe including staying safe online.
- iii. Specialist Support for those with Protected Characteristics – including mental health advice and support, drug and alcohol advice and support. Immigration Advice.
- iv. Support for Children and Young People – to include advocacy, and age appropriate therapy.
- v. Housing Related Support – providing housing related advice and support via the specialist DA Housing Options Officers and the Resettlement Worker offering advice on living safely and independently.

Swindon, as per the guidance will not fulfil the responsibilities to Part 4 in isolation, recent amendments to Homelessness and Secure Tenancy legislation will be considered in a coordinated approach that follows a victim/survivor's housing journey. For example, when a victim / survivor presents as homeless and are considered priority need, they will be able to access quality assured safe accommodation and are provided with specialist support within these settings. Equally, where a victim/survivor is leaving refuge and moving on into the community, that they are provided with safe move-on accommodation and support within these settings, and still access services to maintain secure tenancies when applicable.

Post-separation abuse, which is now recognised in law via the Domestic Abuse Act, is a lived experience for many survivors and may be a time when support is needed most to help sustain safety and freedom from a perpetrator. The safe accommodation needs of survivors accessing help via the local authority will also be considered as part of this strategy.

The Act discourages the use of mixed-sex accommodation which can be threatening and re-traumatising environments for women who have experienced male violence. This type of accommodation will not be offered to victims in Swindon.

Quality Standards - safe accommodation and support services are commissioned using relevant criteria which offers quality assurance.

## **7. Current Safe Accommodation available in Swindon**

- i. Swindon Refuge - offers accommodation to female victims. 20 households in self-contained flats and 2 additional emergency rooms. The victims and families are supported by a range of support services on site.
- ii. Sanctuary Scheme - victims who wish to remain in their homes are offered additional security measures through the Council's Homelessness team. This can also be offered to victims when they move into a new property.
- iii. Existing move on arrangements from the refuge to Council or Housing Association properties already exist.

## **8. Needs Assessment and New Burdens Funding**

There is evidence from the previous and current Public Health Needs Assessments and earlier strategies that gaps in provision including complex needs and male victims exist in Swindon. The New Burdens funding has been used to fill the gap in that provision and the projects outlined below will be evaluated to measure the outcomes.

New Burdens Safe Accommodation – Two new safe accommodation contracts for 12 months have recently been commissioned.

- i. Nelson Trust - offering up to 4 female victims with complex needs safe accommodation with support.
- ii. Stonewater - offering 3 or 4 household self-contained dispersed units of safe accommodation for households who may not be able to access the refuge. E.g. with pets, male victims, working households.
- iii. Funding will also be used to supplement the existing Sanctuary Scheme provision

## **9. Current Service Provision**

- i. Refuge Support Workers support victims living in the refuge
- ii. Children's Workers support children and young people living in the refuge and those accessing support through the community outreach service
- iii. IDVAs (independent Domestic Violence Advisors) support victims in the Community – those victims living in their own home/tenancy, in Great Western Hospital, and at 10 GP Surgeries across the Borough
- iv. 24 Hour local helpline available to victims. Survivors, friends and family

- v. Access to the Recovery Toolkit, a 12 week programme for female victims and also a programme for children and young people

## **10. New Burdens Safe Accommodation Support**

- i. Resettlement Worker to work across Refuge and other safe accommodation to support victims and families when moving on into accommodation.
- ii. Children & Young Person's Worker to work across Refuge and other safe accommodation to support the children when in that accommodation or when moving on.
- iii. Inclusion & Diversity IDVA to work with victims with protected characteristics - BAME, Older People, Gypsy & Travellers, LGBTQ+.
- iv. Multiple Disadvantage/Complex Needs IDVA to work with victims who have additional needs including substance misuse and mental health.
- v. Access to 6 or 12 Week therapeutic interventions for adults from a counselling service.
- vi. Access to therapeutic interventions for children and young people according to assessed need.

## **11. Strategic Priorities in Relation to Part 4 of the DA Act 2021**

- i. Delivering the safe accommodation statutory duty by ensuring all victims have access to safe accommodation
- ii. Build on existing move on arrangements to increase availability of safe accommodation places
- iii. Review and evaluate the new safe accommodation places contracts
- iv. Develop the model of Whole Housing Approach and best practice working with the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA)

## **12. Recommendations from the 2021 Public Health Needs Assessment**

- Improve data collection to develop a broader picture of domestic abuse in Swindon to inform future provision
- Enhance training of front line staff to enable identification of domestic abuse especially in older people
- Develop innovative ways to work and engage with victims with protected characteristics – BAME, LGBTQ, Gypsy & Travellers to encourage them to disclose domestic abuse and seek support
- Provide specialist support for victims and perpetrators with complex needs and multiple disadvantage
- Develop early intervention approaches to identify lower risk victims and their children to prevent escalation to high risk and crisis



- Develop a mechanism for consulting with victims, survivors, by and for groups to ensure the services are meeting the needs of our local community.

In Swindon, we will ensure services are accessible and responsive so those experiencing domestic abuse have prompt access to help and support whether that is safe accommodation or for those accessing support within their community. The key groups intended to benefit from this strategy are:

- Victims and survivors
- Children and young people who have experienced or are living with domestic abuse
- Perpetrators who should be held to account, and supported to change or modify their behaviour to reduce the risk to victims and their children

### **13. Local Partnership Boards (LPB)**

There is an established Domestic Abuse & VAWG Board in Swindon, which reports to the Swindon Community Safety Partnership. This Board will be responsible for delivery of the Statutory Housing Duty and the wider Multi-Agency Domestic Abuse Strategy and action plans attached to them and the development of a performance dashboard. The Board will also be responsible for the review and management of the Safe Accommodation contracts and will report to the Community Safety Partnership Board on a quarterly basis and be responsible for reporting back to the DLUHC on an annual basis. The Terms of Reference and the membership have been reviewed and updated to reflect the changes. These will be reviewed on an annual basis.

### **14. Wider Context to this Strategy**

This Strategy compliments the Swindon Multi Agency Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021 -2024. The requirements of the new duty are only one part of the response to domestic abuse in the Borough. Consideration needs to be given to the wider context of the response both nationally and locally including:

- The Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2021
- The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill 2021
- The Wiltshire Criminal Justice Board Victims and Most Vulnerable Witness Group
- The OPCC Police & Crime Plan
- The National Perpetrator Strategy (when published)

## 15. How Will We Know We Have Made a Difference?

By the end of this Strategy in 2024 we will have:

- Improved housing options for victims: including safe accommodation for those unable to access refuge, remaining in their own home and provision of move-on accommodation.
- Improved access to different levels of support identified by the victim and/or their children including therapeutic support.
- Developed a consultation pathway to seek the views of victims, survivors and perpetrators to inform future service development.
- Increased the number of victims being accommodated in safe accommodation and refuge including victims with complex needs and multi disadvantage.
- Reduction in the number of victims re-presenting at Housing Options for accommodation.
- Reduced the number of repeat victims of domestic abuse due to the increase in the options of interventions and support.
- Reduced the number of serial perpetrators.
- Improved understanding of referral pathways to specialist support services.
- Increased the options for victims to access education, training and employment.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Part 1 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021**

#### **Definition of “domestic abuse”**

1. This section defines “domestic abuse” for the purposes of this Act.
2. Behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is “domestic abuse” if—
  - (a) A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and
  - (b) The behaviour is abusive.
3. Behaviour is “abusive” if it consists of any of the following—
  - (a) Physical or sexual abuse;
  - (b) Violent or threatening behaviour;
  - (c) Controlling or coercive behaviour;
  - (d) Economic abuse (see subsection (4));
  - (e) Psychological, emotional or other abuse;

And it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

4. “Economic abuse” means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B's ability to—
  - (a) Acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or
  - (b) Obtain goods or services.
5. For the purposes of this Act A's behaviour may be behaviour “towards” B despite the fact that it consists of conduct directed at another person (for example, B's child).
6. References in this Act to being abusive towards another person are to be read in accordance with this section.
7. For the meaning of “personally connected”, see section 2.

#### **2 Definition of “personally connected”**

1. For the purposes of this Act, two people are “personally connected” to each other if any of the following applies—
  - (a) They are, or have been, married to each other;
  - (b) They are, or have been, civil partners of each other;

- (c) They have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
- (d) They have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
- (e) They are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other;
- (f) they each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child (see subsection (2));
- (g) They are relatives.

2. For the purposes of subsection (1) (f) a person has a parental relationship in relation to a child if—

- (A) The person is a parent of the child, or
- (b) The person has parental responsibility for the child.

3. in this section—

- “child” means a person under the age of 18 years;
- “civil partnership agreement” has the meaning given by section 73 of the Civil Partnership Act 2004;
- “parental responsibility” has the same meaning as in the Children Act 1989 (see section 3 of that Act);
- “Relative” has the meaning given by section 63(1) of the Family Law Act 1996.

### **3 Children as victims of domestic abuse**

1. This section applies where behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is domestic abuse.

2. Any reference in this Act to a victim of domestic abuse includes a reference to a child who—

- (a) Sees or hears, or experiences the effects of, the abuse, and
- (b) Is related to A or B.

3. A child is related to a person for the purposes of subsection (2) if—

- (A) The person is a parent of, or has parental responsibility for, the child, or
- (b) The child and the person are relatives.

(4) In this section—

- “child” means a person under the age of 18 years;

- “parental responsibility” has the same meaning as in the Children Act 1989 (see section 3 of that Act);
- “Relative” has the meaning given by section 63(1) of the Family Law Act 1996.